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Strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General***

Summary

The present report addresses the theme "Strengthening of the coordination of the United Nations humanitarian assistance to the victims of natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies, with particular attention to reaching the vulnerable segments of the population and the transition from relief to development".

The report begins with an analysis of the causes and effects of humanitarian emergencies, highlighting the regional repercussions of humanitarian crises and the coordination mechanisms and tools adopted by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to address them. It then examines the issue of "reaching the vulnerable populations" within the broad umbrella of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and details some of the challenges to securing safe and reliable humanitarian space for bringing assistance to those affected by humanitarian emergencies. It also underlines the particular efforts required to strengthen assistance to specially affected groups such as internally displaced persons, children, women and the elderly.

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In exploring the issue of the transition from relief to development, the report emphasizes the importance of early, integrated planning and the need to ensure that transitional programmes contribute to reducing the risks and impact of future natural hazards. In response to a request made by Member States, the report also details the finding of an independent review of the consolidated appeals process.

The recommendations contained in the report revolve around the need to enhance regional capacities to respond to humanitarian emergencies, promote a "culture of protection" and adequately plan for the transition from relief to development. The recommendations on the consolidated appeals process focus on the need to strengthen humanitarian strategies and resource mobilization efforts, with increased support from donors and non-governmental organizations.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, and to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on humanitarian assistance, and to subsequent resolutions.

2. The report is also submitted in response to the requests contained in General Assembly resolution 56/107 of 14 December 2001 on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

II. Developments and emerging themes in humanitarian assistance operations, 2001-2002

3. The difficult events of the past year underline the need for a more concerted and effective response to humanitarian emergencies around the world, and for new and innovative thinking on ways in which these emergencies may be avoided or overcome. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have heightened our awareness that we live in an age of increasing interconnectedness, where events in one part of the world can transform the lives of people on the other side of the globe.

4. The challenges of the 1990s have continued into the first years of the twenty-first century. The last decade witnessed an increase in the number of people affected by natural disasters, by 2001, natural disasters had affected some 215 million people. Climate change will continue to increase the number of extreme events that create natural disasters; and environmental emergencies. Meanwhile, the capacity of developing countries' economies to absorb such shocks has been eroded and the increasing occurrence of extreme natural events will increasingly contribute to faltering or failing development. Tragically, armed conflict is also continuing in many countries around the world, bringing with it forced displacement and the targeting of innocent civilians. The alarming spread of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) has increased the vulnerability of communities affected by humanitarian emergencies, creating greater levels of dependency and severely reducing their ability to cope when crisis strikes. Armed conflict further creates and exacerbates the conditions, and the human rights abuses, in which the HIV/AIDS crisis flourishes. For both natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies, the humanitarian community will have to strengthen its response and mobilize greater resources to provide assistance and protection to people in need.

5. The situation in Afghanistan requires that humanitarian assistance be maintained within a context of rebuilding local, regional and national structures and providing a more solid base for peace and stability within the country. Afghanistan is the latest example of where there needs to be an effective transition from relief to recovery and development; an area where the lack of funding mechanisms has created a gap in the international capacity for effective response. The Immediate and Transitional Appeal Programme for Afghanistan provides a new approach in which the development and humanitarian agencies coordinated their responses around a common set of principles. Such efforts may provide for smoother transitional periods in other conflict settings.

A. The nature of crises

6. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 left little doubt that the world cannot isolate itself from events in the war-affected regions of the globe. The fact that the perpetrators of the attacks emerged from an environment characterized by protracted internal conflict only serves to underscore the need to strengthen international cooperation in conflict resolution and prevention. The global interconnectedness of complex humanitarian emergencies was highlighted by the 11 September attacks, but the regional repercussions of natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies have been recognized for some time. In Africa, Asia and South-eastern Europe, civil wars have resulted in massive movements of populations both within and across borders, placing great socio-economic burdens on receiving communities.

7. During the early 1990s, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners provided humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflicts that

frequently began within a country but rapidly developed into regional conflicts. During the past decade, wars have become increasingly regional in nature. The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the Great Lakes crisis of 1994 and the ensuing war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are examples of this trend. These crises demonstrate the inadequacy of dealing with such conflicts on a country-by-country basis. In response, the United Nations has sought to establish a unified presence to deal with the political, humanitarian and human rights aspects of the emergency, and recognized the value of developing a regional approach.

8. The impact of natural disasters rarely respects national boundaries. The effects of drought often go beyond the borders of one State and will affect large areas or regions. For example, the Horn of Africa suffered from widespread drought from 1998. Six countries were affected. The United Nations responded to their problems on a regional and country basis. The response included the Secretary-General's appointment of a Special Envoy on the Drought in the Greater Horn of Africa, who completed her work in 2001. While the area continues to face high risks of drought, the Special Envoy's recommendations highlighted the need for greatly strengthened regional structures and the need to link national early warning, response and preparedness capacities within the region. As the drought situation in the Horn improved, the humanitarian community mobilized to respond to another drought with regional proportions in southern Africa, again highlighting the need for strengthened regional responses. The severe drought in Central and South-west Asia is currently the most widespread geographically and provides a further case where regional responses are most appropriate.

9. The response to natural disasters can be further complicated when such events take place within the context of armed conflict. The eruption of Mount Nyiragongo volcano in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during January and February 2002 and the recent earthquakes in Afghanistan are examples of natural disasters occurring in environments where the coping mechanisms of the affected populations had already been severely eroded by conflict.

10. The ripple effects illustrated by complex humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters underline the considerable need for strong early warning and preparedness measures, as well as mechanisms to inform and share relevant data. Effective early warning and contingency planning can lessen the impact of crises and disasters and assist rapid recovery. Responsible humanitarian action lies not only in responding to the humanitarian consequences of these crises and disasters, but in being comprehensively prepared to address them.

B. Regional responses and building local capacity

11. To better address the regional effects of natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies, the international community recognizes that it will need to adopt a holistic approach. The complex nature of humanitarian emergencies requires a range of solutions the success of which is dependent on strong cooperation and support from Governments and regional organizations. For its part, the humanitarian community needs to strengthen the various tools available, in order to support regional and governmental capacities in responding to all the dimensions of complex crises. United Nations bodies are actively strengthening their regional presence in many areas around the world that are vulnerable to crises, with a view to ensuring that all aspects, including the humanitarian, human rights, political and developmental dimensions, of a given emergency are coherently addressed.

12. In Sierra Leone, the prospects for lasting peace have significantly improved, owing to the general success of the disarmament and demobilization process, the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone peacekeepers throughout the country and the final preparations for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Special Court. The increasing level of security in most of the country means that humanitarian organizations will need to continue accelerating their efforts to aid the tens of thousands of internally displaced and refugees who have begun returning to their communities.

13. However, as the recent history of the region has shown, the stability of Sierra Leone and that of its neighbours, particularly Guinea and Liberia, will remain inextricably linked. Currently, the region remains volatile as illustrated by the re-emergence of conflict in Liberia. Intermittent fighting in the north of the country has spread further southwards resulting in the displacement of 35,000 people to Monrovia, while

over 10,000 refugees have reportedly entered Sierra Leone and some 5,000 have fled to Guinea. Efforts have been made to ensure that the sanctions imposed on Liberia do not have a negative humanitarian impact. These can be undermined if donors withdraw or seriously reduce their humanitarian assistance; or are seen to reduce humanitarian assistance. Meeting humanitarian needs should be unlinked from the larger political debate that surrounds Liberia and Guinea.

14. The Horn of Africa is a region that has experienced the combined effects of both natural disasters and complex emergencies for many years. A period of stability and respite from natural disasters has helped to improve the humanitarian situation. In the temporary security zone and the adjacent areas of Eritrea and Ethiopia, the humanitarian situation has remained stable, enabling agencies to undertake a wide variety of emergency interventions and reconstruction activities. During the reporting period, more than 180,000 internally displaced persons and 43,000 refugees were assisted in returning to their homes in Eritrea and to areas within the temporary security zone. Landmines have made certain areas inaccessible and constitute one of the main reasons for some 57,000 internally displaced persons not being able to return. In Ethiopia, the humanitarian situation has also generally improved following the 2000 drought disaster and its lingering effects in 2001. Since the cessation of hostilities with Eritrea, more than 250,000 internally displaced persons have been assisted in returning to their home areas in the north of the country.

15. The Horn of Africa remains a region that faces high risks of natural disasters that will have a serious impact on the lives of people throughout the region. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is in the process of expanding its regional support office for East and Central Africa in order to help strengthen regional response mechanisms and enhance support for existing humanitarian issues in the Horn of Africa. Part of the work of the regional support office will be to focus on humanitarian advocacy to raise awareness of humanitarian principles among key stakeholders, mobilize resources and promote a response to early warning signals.

16. There is strong evidence that the world will face an increasing number of climatically related disasters in the near future. Another El Niño cycle may soon start and disaster-affected countries, the United Nations and its partners must be well prepared for it. Although limiting the negative effects of disasters depends on the prevention and mitigation efforts made at the national level, more needs to be done to ensure that disaster prevention, mitigation, and preparedness and response planning are factored into regional planning systems. The experience of South-east Asian countries, such as Cambodia and Viet Nam, demonstrates the value of instituting effective response and preparedness measures. In 1999 and 2000, over three million people were affected by floods. Mitigation measures initiated during the response resulted in a far lower level of impact during the floods in 2001. The Consultative Meeting on Regional Cooperation in the Field of Natural Disasters, held in Nepal, was used to disseminate the concept of disaster risk management, a key concept in preparedness and mitigation planning.

17. The United Nations continues to strengthen regional response and local capacity-building for natural disasters. Latin America and the Caribbean have been particularly active in this area, where there is considerable expertise and a sound practice base on which to build. The range of agencies and countries involved, which include the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, the Pan-American Health Organization, and the Centre for Disaster Prevention in Central America, as well as countries with a history of humanitarian assistance, such as Cuba, Chile and Mexico, demonstrates the commitment to regional preparedness activities.

18. In Africa, natural disasters continue to impact on extremely fragile societies and economies. For the third consecutive year, southern Africa was affected by natural disasters. This year a combination of drought and floods affected Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe are suffering from severe food shortages as a result, with Malawi the hardest hit. The effects of these regional natural disasters highlight the need for more advanced national level contingency planning and the need for greater regional information sharing and cooperation.

C. Contingency planning

19. A more effective response to natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies also requires improved contingency planning and preparedness among the members of the Inter-Agency Standing

Committee. While individual agency preparedness and contingency planning is relatively strong, integration needs to be strengthened to ensure better inter-agency planning. The importance of inter-agency planning lies in the fact that it ensures a common understanding of the problems and constraints besetting affected populations. It establishes a common set of objectives and thereby promotes an effective use of limited resources. The humanitarian community recognizes that improved response will depend on helping to build a strong local and national response capacity in a coordinated manner.

20. The Inter-Agency Reference Group on Preparedness and Contingency Planning has strengthened guidelines, which have been incorporated into the planning processes for a number of countries. The planning processes that are now being undertaken by United Nations agencies will allow better planning of regional stocks, the identification of key facilities that can release resources to respond to disasters and identify areas where national and local capacity should be strengthened. These steps must then be incorporated into the other main planning processes such as the consolidated appeals process/Common Humanitarian Action Plan and, where relevant, the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework. A good example of the linkage between contingency planning and the consolidated appeals process is the Consolidated Appeal for West Africa where different scenarios were outlined and the parameters of their effect on the humanitarian situation identified. This helped the United Nations to identify a comprehensive strategy for addressing such potential crises. A repository of contingency plans and a dedicated lessons-learned process will also be established to ensure that contingency plans remain flexible.

D. Other preparedness and response tools

21. An effective response to natural disasters is based on the availability and readiness of emergency teams that are prepared to contribute to a coherent response to crises. The United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams seek to fulfil this function by providing a range of services, primarily related to on-site coordination in the field. Recognizing the need to contribute to the national disaster response efforts of developing and disaster-prone nations, the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination system has continued its efforts to recruit additional members from these areas. In 2001, induction training was held for the first time in the Caribbean, adding 8 countries to the system. However, although membership in Latin America and the Pacific is satisfactory, only 7 of the system's 164 current members are from African and Asian countries. Efforts are now under way to recruit additional members from the Asian region and, in July 2002, an induction course will be held in India with some 30 participants from countries in the region.

22. Another important tool for natural disaster response is the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, which coordinates and mobilizes specialized search and rescue teams, who contribute to disaster response by providing on-site facilities and other technical equipment needed to save lives. Following consultations with interested Member States, it has been decided to develop guidelines to expedite the work of international search and rescue operations for further consideration by the General Assembly.

23. Other efforts are under way to facilitate responses in times of natural, environmental or technological disasters. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is continuing its work with the United Nations Environment Programme to ensure an integrated and coordinated response to environmental emergencies, based on strengthened national environmental emergency response mechanisms. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is taking the lead in the development of an international disaster response law. In its broad form, the law seeks to cover areas of disaster prevention, preparedness, relief and post-disaster rehabilitation. It will provide a legal framework, based on existing hard and soft law, covering situations of natural and technological disaster and incorporating a right to security from natural and technological disasters.

24. Logistics support for humanitarian emergencies has been strengthened by the formal establishment of the Inter-agency Standing Committee-approved United Nations Joint Logistics Centre, operated by the World Food Programme. The Centre proved successful in Afghanistan where it provided a coordination function for all agency-managed logistical assets, while also maximizing the use of limited transport infrastructure, preventing competitive bidding among humanitarian

agencies for commercial transport and distinguishing humanitarian logistics from military activities. Where an effective response requires the use of military and civil defence assets at short notice, the Military and Civil Defence Unit continues to act as the United Nations focal point for dealing with civilian and military actors involved in disaster response. The 2000 Fribourg Forum also launched a process of dialogue between the United Nations, Member States and regional and international organizations, to promote coherence and complementarity in crisis management and humanitarian action, including access to and the effective use of national assets. In addition, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is working towards a more efficient management of humanitarian supplies by developing a common platform and database for the different humanitarian agency tracking systems.

25. The experience of the past few years has demonstrated the importance of humanitarian organizations providing accurate and timely information on existing needs and who undertakes what activities in response. The establishment of humanitarian information centres has proved extremely useful in managing information at the field level on behalf of the humanitarian assistance community. The centres have become a technical resource, providing advice and services on key issues for individual humanitarian players, and encouraged and facilitated coordinated information-gathering and increased information-sharing among the members of the humanitarian community. The centres facilitate the implementation and respect of policies for common data standards and information activities that have been mutually agreed by the partners themselves.

26. At Headquarters, ReliefWeb is an important source of updated and analytical information, shared by a wide range of humanitarian actors. While electronic mail and the World Wide Web are the preferred vehicles for delivering information to those with the relevant technology, radio remains the most widely used medium to reach and inform the millions affected by natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies in developing countries. For this reason, the Integrated Regional Information Network intends to expand its outreach radio project in Somalia and Burundi to other parts of Africa and Central Asia, to provide impartial news and information to the victims of humanitarian crises.

III. Strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance in cases of natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies, with particular attention to reaching the vulnerable populations and the transition from relief to development

A. Challenges to and opportunities for reaching the vulnerable segments of the populations

27. Reaching the vulnerable sections of the population is essential for providing adequate protection and assistance in humanitarian emergencies and for strengthening their capacity to cope with future crises. But doing so faces a number of challenges. People may be isolated and cut-off from easy access because of the effects of natural disasters, armed conflict or widespread violence. Hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians are under daily attack. The responsibility for ending their suffering lies primarily with the Member States involved but also, to varying degrees, with the broader international community. In situations of armed conflict, access may have to be negotiated with armed elements not connected to any structures of State authority. The operating environment may be further worsened by the presence of warlords or militia who are pursuing economic interests and actively creating an unstable environment to further their own aims. The safety and security of humanitarian staff continues to be a chief concern in reaching the vulnerable segments of the population in armed conflicts. While there is little that can be done to reduce the level of threat in insecure environments, the United Nations and the humanitarian community have made greater efforts to reduce the level of risk to which staff are exposed, through the provision of appropriate mechanisms and resources. While more is required, the Secretary-General is gratified to note that the General Assembly shares this concern and has taken a number of decisions to strengthen the system's security framework and culture of security awareness.

1. Protection of civilians

28. The human toll of the many crises outlined above, and of the many more that are not mentioned in the present report is overwhelming. A roughly estimated 20 to 25 million people have been displaced within their own countries because of violence and human rights abuses and an additional 12.1 million refugees worldwide are also in need of protection and assistance. In the Middle East, for example, the level of violence, in an already bitter conflict, has increased dramatically since the beginning of the year. The number of attacks on civilians has reached an appalling level, few of whom had any options for moving out of harm's way. This conflict also highlights the difficulties for the humanitarian community to reach and assist those in need. Access to vulnerable populations is an essential element of the protection of civilians and must be protected.

29. In Afghanistan, Angola, Somalia, the Sudan, the Middle East and elsewhere, long and vicious conflicts have meant that entire generations have witnessed violence and brutality as a "normal way of life". This climate must end. A "culture of protection" must take its place. This culture demands an increased focus on human security, in which peoples' needs provide the driving force for humanitarian action, and where the legal and physical security of the individual is at its core, based on a respect for fundamental human rights. The need to create a far-reaching culture of protection that guides all of our actions and responses on behalf of victims of armed conflict has been widely recognized. Much more needs to be done to ensure that it becomes a reality. The primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with Governments. This is clearly set out in the provisions of international law and is stressed as one of the key guiding principles of humanitarian assistance adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/182 and reiterated in other General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The efforts undertaken by humanitarian actors, or the arrangements negotiated by them, are secondary to the State's responsibility. However, there may be circumstances where States are unwilling or unable to meet their responsibilities. In such instances, there can be no excuse for being indifferent to humanitarian need and it is the responsibility of all to assist humanitarian action to reach and protect the vulnerable sections of the populations.

A broad culture

30. The protection of civilians is a broad umbrella concept that embraces a range of interconnected issues. Thus, establishing and strengthening a culture of protection requires action across a broad number of fields. These include access, justice and reconciliation, the special needs and vulnerabilities of refugees, the internally displaced, women and children, the safety of United Nations personnel, the illicit exploitation of natural resources, the proliferation of and trafficking in small arms and the possible humanitarian impact of sanctions and landmines. Using the latter as an example, landmines pose an ever-present physical threat to civilians caught in areas of conflict and, through their effects, add to the burden of vulnerability of any society. They also constitute a considerable threat to humanitarian activities, in terms of reaching vulnerable populations, as they hinder, or even prevent, the provision of basic services. Humanitarian programmes that are designed to enhance the protection of civilians must not only work towards reducing the threat to their security but build up the capacity of the authorities and the local communities themselves to overcome these problems and cope with their effects. This requires a better understanding on the part of all stakeholders of the issues at play, the legal frameworks in place to address them and the practical steps required to put this framework into effect. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee, under the chairmanship of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, has engaged, and will continue to engage, in a series of consultations within the system and with Member States and other interested parties, both at headquarters and in the field, to ensure that enhancing the culture of protection is based on coordinated efforts.

The legal framework

31. There is an established legal framework that provides the basis for many of the responsibilities and obligations of Member States towards populations in need. This same framework guides the activities of humanitarian agencies working in support of Governments dealing with humanitarian crises. Events of the last few years, including the growing toll of civilian deaths and the frequency and severity of assaults on humanitarian personnel, have demonstrated a continuing and possibly increasing disregard for the provisions of international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law. This has severely hampered the

ability to provide humanitarian assistance and protection. To address this, humanitarian and human rights agencies have enhanced their efforts to advocate for and promote the ratification and implementation of international human rights and humanitarian law instruments. Ratification needs to be accompanied by a better understanding of and a commitment to comply with the terms of those instruments. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is developing strategies and initiatives to enhance the integration of human rights into humanitarian action. Field practices developed by humanitarian workers to prevent or mitigate human rights abuse[1] and practical guidelines on how to integrate human rights into humanitarian action will soon be broadly disseminated to United Nations country teams and humanitarian partners.

32. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol are not yet truly universal, as many States have yet to accede to these instruments. To date, 143 countries have ratified the 1951 Convention but this figure is low compared to the number of states which have signed other human rights instruments. Throughout 2001 and 2002, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees conducted a series of global consultations on international protection to revitalize the framework for refugee protection and support Member States in addressing current humanitarian challenges.

Separating civilians from combatants

33. In situations of armed conflict, the blurring of distinctions between civilians and combatants defies attempts at any effective protection measures. The best protection for civilians is clearly the prevention of conflict. However, where conflict does break out, too often civilians are not treated as a distinct group, but are increasingly thought of as part of the war and frequently specifically targeted. One of the key challenges for the protection of civilians is to ensure that combatants are separated from civilians, a problem that the international community has had difficulty addressing. Massive displacement is a direct, and often intended, result of the fighting. The past year has seen hundreds of thousands of people streaming across borders or fleeing within their own States to seek protection. However, combatants or armed elements are frequently intermingled with the displaced, adding to the difficulty of reaching those in need.

34. The presence of armed elements in camps for refugees or the displaced has frequently prevented humanitarian workers from accessing the vulnerable segments of the populations and resulted in the diversion of humanitarian aid away from the most needy. By virtue of being armed, such elements hold sway over the civilian population, exerting an authority based on fear, and pose a threat to those seeking to assist that same population. In his two reports to the Security Council on the protection of civilians,[2] the Secretary-General called for increased efforts to separate combatants and armed elements from civilians in camps and recommended a number of measures to achieve this. They include developing clear criteria and procedures for identifying and separating armed elements in situations of massive population displacement; deploying international military observers to monitor the situations in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees when the presence of arms, combatants and armed elements is suspected; mobilizing international support for national security forces, when necessary, to support the measures being taken to protect civilians; and advocating and mobilizing support for the relocation of camps that are too close to the border with the refugees' country of origin. When the conflict is over, complementary measures are required in order to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate former combatants, so that they too can return to a normal civilian way of life, in a manner that does not destabilize the community or pose a potential security threat. Such measures may include income-generating alternatives and incentives for voluntary return of weapons.

Ensuring protection

35. Given the breadth of issues that impact on the protection of civilians, a number of initiatives have been taken to transform into action the Secretary-General's recommendations and Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians. These include the development of an aide-memoire; closer cooperation and coordination between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (on behalf of the humanitarian community) on the protection of civilians, including the adoption by the Department and the Office of standing operating procedures on these issues; and a reorganization of the Secretary-General's recommendations into a "roadmap" that will help assign responsibilities, in collaboration with the

Security Council. The aide-memoire is a very practical tool that has resulted from strong collaboration between humanitarian and human rights agencies and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and will continue to be updated. It will serve as a checklist to ensure that the issues of the protection of civilians in armed conflict are systematically taken into consideration and mainstreamed into daily activities. It identifies 13 core objectives in protecting civilians in armed conflict and highlights key issues for consideration in meeting those objectives. It will also serve, in part, as a useful framework for the consideration of the interrelated, complementary issues of the protection of civilians in armed conflict; women, peace and security; children in armed conflict; and conflict prevention.

36. Importantly, the Secretary-General's call for a "culture of protection" means that the challenges of protecting civilian populations can only be met by reaching across traditional lines and creating synergies among many actors. In this regard, we can build upon the pioneering work of some regional organizations, particularly the Organization of African Unity, and its efforts to place more emphasis on the protection of civilians through various treaties and mechanisms. Successfully creating a culture of protection requires the concerted and sustained efforts of a broad constituency. The process of round-table consultations on how to implement measures to protect civilians, which have already gathered the views and ideas of Member States, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions and led to more informed discussions and a solid determination to take the matter forward, will be continued and developed throughout the coming year.

2. Humanitarian space

37. As noted above, the primary responsibility for expanding and strengthening the ability to reach, assist and protect vulnerable populations rests with Governments. According to the Geneva conventions, armed groups also have a direct responsibility to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict. Where Governments themselves do not have the means effectively to assist and protect vulnerable populations, they should seek the support of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners in providing the necessary protection and assistance. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a novel agreement between the Government and a rebel group, brokered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General with the support of the United Nations humanitarian community, United Nations peacekeepers, non-governmental organizations and donors, resulted in the launch of the first humanitarian "Peace Boat" between Kinshasa and the rebel-held town of Mogalo in August 2001. Successful negotiations with another major rebel group resulted in similar voyages to central Democratic Republic of the Congo in March 2002 and Kisangani in May 2002. Reopening traditional trade and transport routes has the important side effects of reinvigorating economic life and reconnecting communities divided by war. The same humanitarian strategy of negotiating for certain issues to be dealt with outside the mindset of conflict, has seen national school examinations, national immunization days, the movement of Congolese experts around the country and across front lines, and the delivery of humanitarian aid successfully implemented.

38. To be successful, humanitarian negotiators must be consistent, transparent, accountable and credible in their pursuit of humanitarian objectives and obtaining reliable humanitarian space. The negotiations, and any formal or informal agreements that result, must be underpinned by international standards for the protection of civilian populations and key humanitarian principles, such as impartiality and neutrality. And Member States must be willing to support the humanitarian actors undertaking such negotiations and the agreements that they reach, including where these are made with non-State actors. It must be stressed that the fact that humanitarian actors undertake such negotiations with armed groups in no way affects the legal status of those groups. These agreements have sometimes taken the form of "codes of conduct", "principles and protocols for humanitarian operations", memorandums of understanding, and so on. Examples include the "ground rules" agreements established by Operation Lifeline Sudan, the Joint Policy of Operation and the Principles and Protocols of Humanitarian Operation in Liberia, the Code of Conduct for Humanitarian Agencies in Sierra Leone, and the negotiations on access to those in need of humanitarian assistance that are under way in Angola, following the announcement of a ceasefire on 13 March 2002 and the subsequent signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Angolan Armed Forces and the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) on 4 April.

39. In order to ensure a better coordinated, principled and coherent approach to the involvement of humanitarian agencies with armed groups, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is developing a guidance manual on terms of engagement with armed groups in situations of conflict, with benchmarks and options for the engagement or disengagement of aid agencies, best practices, and possible alternatives to direct engagement, such as advocacy for the respect of international standards. Access negotiations will invariably only be truly successful if they are coordinated. Such negotiations are not simply a one-off event. Sustained humanitarian response requires that humanitarian space be obtained, managed and maintained throughout a conflict by keeping the parties continuously engaged. The involvement of too many humanitarian actors pushing different agendas based on their varying mandates can not only lead to confusion but, more seriously, to obstacles to reaching the vulnerable population and insecurity for humanitarian workers themselves. The Standing Committee is seeking to develop more coordinated and creative approaches to access negotiations, for example, by pooling agency interests consistent with their mandates and agreeing on mutually complementary sectoral negotiations. Humanitarian coordinators are tasked through their terms of reference with ensuring that efforts to gain reliable humanitarian space are properly coordinated and based on strategic planning and adequate preparation.

3. Criminalization of the economy

40. Criminalization of the economy provides a further threat to humanitarian action and, specifically, to how humanitarian workers can operate in the particular environment that exists when certain criminal activities flourish in the power vacuum created by armed conflict and weak political or administrative authorities. The issue was raised in the 2001 report to the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council (A/56/95-E/2001/85), and remains a preoccupation. The strongmen who head informal or alternative power structures established to pursue economic gain frequently seek to reduce or eliminate any threats posed by the local traditional authority exercised by community leaders. This is largely achieved by actively maintaining a situation of violence and instability, including by inciting ethnic hatred and the exclusion of particular groups from local debates. The actions of humanitarian workers seeking to work with and empower local communities can easily be perceived as a threat to these alternative power structures and to the strongmen's pursuit of riches, thus making themselves potential direct targets of violence.

41. Since 11 September 2001, the international community has become more acutely aware that ignoring the plight of populations trapped in the midst of the violence inherent to failed or rogue state structures, not only has regional consequences, as in the Mano River Union, where the illegal trade of diamonds fuelled conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone and attacks on borders with Guinea, but can also have negative consequences for the global community. The link between poverty and humanitarian emergencies is made more complex by the breakdown of institutions of law and order, including institutions of the family and institutions on the local level that safeguard the protection of fundamental and universal human rights. Add to this dire poverty the additional burden of collapsed or ineffective States, and the result is often a reinvigoration of "parallel" informal economies. Frequently in complex humanitarian emergencies, paramilitary structures are able to take root in, and in turn support, such underground economies, which are generally commodity-based and characterized by barter. Additional problems, such as the trafficking of illegal commodities across porous borders and the trafficking in women and children, can then emerge.

42. This clearly creates a hostile environment for humanitarian workers who are attempting to address the needs of vulnerable groups in such situations of economic and politically based violence. Their room for manoeuvre will very much depend on the priorities of the rogue elements and the extent to which they are motivated by economic interest or political ambition. Where economic interests prevail, criminal groups will have little regard for the humanitarian needs of local inhabitants, as their focus is more on maximizing profits at all costs. Maintaining a state of instability and violence might actually ensure a dependent workforce to aid in the exploitation of resources. However, where such warlords become interested in the long-term sustainability of their economic activities or harbour some political ambitions, they may attempt to obtain varying levels of acceptability among the local population. This might, to some extent, define their willingness to address the needs of the population

in the areas in which they operate and thus their openness to humanitarian activities.

43. In these circumstances, negotiating to reach the vulnerable population in a safe and meaningful way should be based on a thorough analysis of the operating environment, including a more comprehensive appreciation of the impact and effectiveness of humanitarian action. It also requires the support of Member States, donors and the private sector, to apply pressure on armed groups where they can, and back the activities and efforts of humanitarian actors in a resolute fashion. In the broader context, improved awareness of these dynamics by the international community as a whole should be reflected in better targeted aid and the measures that support Governments before their authority is eroded and criminal war economies are able to take root.

B. Reaching specially affected groups

44. Addressing the needs of the vulnerable sectors of the population requires particular attention and support for specially affected groups, such as internally displaced persons, women, children and the elderly and disabled. As with all persons affected by humanitarian emergencies, these groups are entitled to protection and assistance and should benefit from the responses outlined above. This section outlines how these responses might need to be further refined in order to take into account the particular needs of separately defined groups.

1. Internally displaced persons

45. Rough estimates indicate that more than 50 million people are internally displaced worldwide, slightly more than half because of natural disasters, and the remainder because of armed conflict or situations of violence or massive human rights violations. Although many internally displaced persons find themselves in situations analogous to those faced by refugees, they rarely benefit from similar levels of protection and assistance. This is not to diminish the fact that all groups of displaced persons face incredible hardship, uncertainty and despair through being uprooted from their homes. In many circumstances, they begin their flight side by side, but the crossing of an international border makes a difference to the kind of protection and assistance to which they become entitled and the mechanisms through which this can be provided. Over the past ten years, more attention has been paid to the particular plight of internally displaced persons and legal principles, in particular the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,[3] and institutional frameworks have been developed to better respond to their needs.

46. However, despite this increased awareness, very real problems still remain in the field. Reaching internally displaced persons can pose a huge challenge for a variety of reasons. In the case of natural disasters, these are often technical or logistical and call for many of the mechanisms discussed above. Additional concerns arise for those displaced during complex humanitarian emergencies. Internally displaced persons often become trapped in areas of severe fighting, unable to reach, or sometimes prevented from crossing, international borders to safety. Often their efforts to flee lead them to isolated areas, cut off from humanitarian assistance. Their status becomes uncertain, exposing them to risk and suspicion. They can easily become the targets for further violence. To bring more focused attention to the particular problems of the internally displaced and ensure a more coordinated response, the Emergency Relief Coordinator has established a non-operational, inter-agency Unit on Internal Displacement. The Unit, which became fully functional in January 2002, aims to ensure a predictable and concerted approach among all concerned actors to the problems of internal displacement, using the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as the overall framework for its work. The Unit will be supported by the Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement in an advisory capacity.

47. Since its establishment, the Unit has focused its activities on two key areas. First, it has provided support and guidance on specific country situations, ensuring an increased focus on displacement on the part of all humanitarian actors, serving as a catalyst in guiding the response to crises of internal displacement and supporting the mainstreaming of internal displacement issues into the work of Inter-Agency Standing Committee partners. In evolving situations, such as those in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, the Unit carried out missions to assess the internal displacement situation, identify the gaps in response and make specific recommendations for improvement. In West Africa, Colombia and Uganda, the Unit offered expertise and guidance to assist the Government and

United Nations country teams in designing response strategies to their particular internal displacement problems. The Unit will also provide support in the coming year to a number of protracted and/or forgotten crises of internal displacement, such as in Angola, Burundi, Indonesia, Nigeria and Somalia, with the intention of improving operational response at the field level by promoting clear lines of responsibility. Second, the Unit is promoting system-wide improvements in the response to internal displacement. Through training and the recent establishment of a "protection coalition" of inter-agency partners, the Unit will develop an inter-agency protection capacity to identify critical protection needs, both at the country operation level and in the overall protection framework, and improve the quality and efficiency of field protection interventions.

48. In close collaboration with the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons and other concerned actors, the Unit will increasingly engage in raising awareness of the problems of internally displaced and advocating for their solution. The mandate of the Representative of the Secretary-General, established by the Commission on Human Rights in 1992, has led the Representative to visit and produce reports with recommendations on over 20 situations of internal displacement, including in Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Burundi, Colombia, East Timor, Georgia, Indonesia and the Sudan, in recent years. His mandate also includes engaging in dialogue with Governments and other pertinent actors, developing and promoting a legal framework, particularly the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and studying institutional arrangements and other areas with a view to promoting better protection and assistance for the internally displaced.

49. At the national level, an increasing number of Governments are incorporating the Guiding Principles into legislation and policy. For example, in Angola, the Guiding Principles form the basis of the Norms on the Resettlement of the Internally Displaced. In Burundi, they underpin a framework for consultation on the protection of internally displaced persons that brings together Government officials, United Nations agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations. In Colombia, a Presidential Directive of November 2001 recalls two decisions of the Constitutional Court citing the Guiding Principles and elaborates Government responsibility for protecting and assisting the internally displaced. The Government of Georgia has established a special parliamentary commission to bring its electoral laws into line with the Guiding Principles and the Government of Uganda is drawing on them for its new national policy for the internally displaced and implementation plan for the protection and return of the internally displaced in the north. Regional organizations, in particular the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the Economic Community of West African States, and local non-governmental organizations, lawyers associations and other civil society groups have also been involved in the promotion and use of the Guiding Principles and the accompanying Handbook in an increasing number of countries.

2. Women

50. Women suffer from the same violence or disasters that affect the rest of the civilian population but, in addition, face particular risks because of gender discrimination. Much more needs to be done to reach women affected by crises, in a manner that addresses their particular needs and actively supports their own capacity to contribute to the response. These risks often take the form of sexual violence and abuse and are exacerbated because of the widespread inequality faced by women in many sectors of society. The recent allegations of sexual exploitation in West Africa have exposed some of the extreme violations and discrimination suffered by women in emergencies. But these issues are global and require focused efforts to prevent and protect women from gender-based violence, trafficking and other forms of abuse. Access to reproductive and other forms of health care, counselling after violence, psychosocial support and the full range of remedies equally needs to be stepped up. The frequent exclusion of women and gender dimensions from efforts to prepare for, respond to and recover from humanitarian crises, be they natural disasters or complex humanitarian emergencies, needs to be more robustly addressed. The views of women must be sought and heard on issues ranging from camp management, safety and security, distribution mechanisms, delivery of services and avenues of recourse when problems arise. The promotion and protection of the rights of women to participate freely in political, economic and social decision-making and

leadership structures need to be vastly strengthened and increased.

51. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has continued to mainstream gender into the humanitarian response to emergencies, by identifying and improving tools and mechanisms for integrating gender analysis into strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. In conflict situations, this gender analysis should cover the political, humanitarian and human rights dimensions of the conflict. Programmes have to be monitored and evaluated against agreed indicators and relevant human rights standards to determine to what extent the humanitarian community has been able to address critical gender issues and the specific needs of the most vulnerable population groups. The impact of child and gender advisers being incorporated into peacekeeping missions should be assessed to determine where further progress is needed.

52. Women are often treated solely as vulnerable and are overlooked as powerful factors for positive change. For example, recent research has shown that they are the foremost actors in community-based disaster reduction activities. Thus, adaptive community-based initiatives, which are inclusive in nature and based on a carefully considered gender perspective, can improve the capacity of the entire community to respond to and overcome the effects of crises. Their role in peace processes and rebuilding after the conflict is slowly being better understood, but should be more seriously and proactively encouraged. In Afghanistan, there is better appreciation of the role that women played in reaching and assisting people, even when cloaked in silence. Afghan women have made their voices increasingly heard, both on national and international platforms. They were very involved in the peace process, although their numbers still remain few in government. Humanitarian agencies need to recognize and support the involvement of women in the design, management and implementation of programmes that seek to rebuild the institutions and structures of Afghanistan. The initiative of the Mano River Women's Peace Network in West Africa has contributed to political discussions at the highest level between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone regarding steps towards regional peace. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women demanded to be adequately represented in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue and their participation in that country's peace process and their ability to address gender issues within the substantive agenda of the negotiations is now being supported.

53. Women must participate in decision-making, not only because their involvement will produce better decisions and more effective responses, but also because they have a full range of human rights, including their right to freedom from discrimination, that can hardly be respected without their involvement in decision-making processes. Support for this participation has to go beyond lip service and be translated into real and concrete projects, based on genuine engagement, on a priority basis.

3. Children

54. The special session of the General Assembly on children presents an important opportunity to draw international attention to the specific rights and challenges of those girls and boys who are the most marginalized, many of whom are affected by armed conflict. The importance of securing humanitarian access to all children living in conflict zones is critical if the humanitarian community is to support Governments in providing the basic assistance and protection that these children require. Access to abducted children, especially girls, is particularly crucial. The entry into force, on 12 February 2002, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (General Assembly resolution 54/263, annex I) provides important protection by raising from 15 to18 years, the age at which direct participation in armed conflict will be permitted, and establishing a ban on compulsory recruitment below the age of 18. The Protocol will also have significant implications for the scope of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for child soldiers. The extensive advocacy efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations not only contributed to the adoption of the Protocol but has also resulted in a number of commitments by parties to conflict not to use child soldiers. Member States are thus urged to follow suit and ratify the Optional Protocol as soon as possible so that this becomes a widely adopted international standard.

55. The extremely disturbing allegations of sexual abuse committed by humanitarian workers in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, referred to above (para. 50),

have reminded us that protecting children and women requires constant vigilance. The Secretary-General has insisted that there must be no impunity for perpetrators and adequate steps must be taken to prevent this in the future. The Secretary-General has called for an investigation into the crimes that occurred in West Africa and to the failures in our systems that allowed them to happen. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee established an especially dedicated Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises. Within the overall objective of strengthening and enhancing the protection and care of children and women in situations of humanitarian crisis and conflict, the Task Force will make recommendations specifically aimed at eliminating sexual abuse and exploitation by humanitarian personnel and the misuse of humanitarian assistance. The recommendations will encompass codes of conduct, recruitment processes, training and disciplinary regimes for humanitarian workers and a careful review and refining of protection and delivery mechanisms to ensure that the necessary safeguards and avenues of recourse are in place.

4. The elderly and the disabled

56. The numbers of older people affected by crises is increasing. Figures of refugees and internally displaced persons can often hide the full extent of the problem. Often the elderly and the disabled are too frail to move away from affected areas and sometimes they have to be left behind while the rest of the community flees. Sometimes older persons may become targets of political violence because of their particular stature in the community. In many societies and in most emergencies, old age, disability, poverty and vulnerability are closely intertwined. That being said, older people should not be seen simply as burdens on a community: their experience and knowledge constitute assets for a community. Older persons may serve as respected formal or informal leaders of communities, particularly in the areas of peace-building and reconciliation and societal recovery. According to World Health Organization estimates, up to 10 per cent of the world's population has a disability and the majority of them, about 80 per cent, live in developing, disaster-prone countries. Concerted efforts must be made to access the elderly and disabled during a crisis and either bring them to safety or provide the necessary protection and assistance on the spot. The United Nations Principles for Older Persons (General Assembly resolution 46/91, annex) provide the basis for ensuring that the unique needs of older refugees are acknowledged and reflected in protection and programming initiatives and that older refugees are recognized as active and contributing members of their communities.

C. Supporting the vulnerable population in the transition from relief to development

57. Efforts to reach and aid the most vulnerable persons affected by crises can only be sustained if there is a clear strategy for moving as quickly as possible away from the simple provision of emergency relief and towards a more comprehensive humanitarian and development assistance programme. Experience has shown the importance of linking relief to development at the earliest possible stage. The transition from relief to development is more than an economic process. It involves institutional change that engages the full participation of society and establishes the basis for stability through recognition of the human rights of civilians.

58. The ways in which humanitarian actors negotiate for access to needy populations, target assistance, and organize delivery often have an important impact on local communities and politics. It is important to ensure that the way aid is provided does not weaken or destroy any existing coping mechanisms. In fact, assistance efforts should provide the seeds of future recovery and rehabilitation, by strengthening local capacities and encouraging communities to begin, even in the midst of crisis, to make their own way towards sustainable development. A key lesson is that there can be no transition to development without the involvement and participation of the community and local structures and institutions. Frequently, humanitarian assistance still focuses on the issue of meeting needs and can all too easily ignore the importance of involving the beneficiaries in managing and shaping their lives. The transition from relief to development is a critical period in the formation of capable and effective institutions which are a prerequisite to a return to stability. Yet such periods are often marred by resentment when humanitarian actors do not effectively engage nascent and developing structures. Closing the funding gap between relief and development can also be made more difficult by the

conditionality of assistance. There are a number of circumstances in which donors attach conditions to the provision of development assistance. However, humanitarian assistance must be provided without such conditionality.

59. In the most recent response to the Afghanistan crisis, humanitarian, human rights, and development partners worked together to strategize and produce the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People. The Programme was founded on assessments made by both humanitarian and development actors, including the Bretton Woods institutions. It complemented a five-year plan for rehabilitation and development by highlighting the issues that most urgently needed to be addressed in the first year, in order to form a sound basis for future recovery and rehabilitation. In addition, relief, recovery and reconstruction activities will be fully integrated under one pillar of the recently established United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. This will help to ensure that all United Nations efforts are harnessed to fully support the implementation of the political process. In the Republic of the Congo, the United Nations country team produced its second annual all-in-one "United Nations Plan", fusing together elements of the United Nations humanitarian appeal, the common assessment and the development framework into a unitary approach.

60. The transition from relief to development following natural disasters should specifically seek to reduce the vulnerability to future hazards. As an El Niño cycle begins, many parts of the world will have to contend with the more frequent and in all probability, more extensive occurrences of droughts and floods. Unfortunately, as the risks and frequency of natural hazards increase, the capacity of many societies to withstand and cope with the impact of such events is diminishing. Overall vulnerabilities to natural disasters are increasing. Some of the reasons for this are linked to the process of development. For example, rapid levels of urbanization leading to the growth of mega-cities have frequently been associated with a fragile infrastructure, where many people are concentrated in high-risk housing with fragile services. Inevitably, with urbanization, people have lost their traditional coping mechanisms and support systems, so that when disaster strikes there are higher levels of destruction and less ability to recover livelihoods.

61. The process of development can also erode the capacity to establish, manage and implement appropriate regulatory frameworks that afford a degree of protection to the vulnerable segments of the population and are a critical element in preparedness and mitigation measures. The weakness of land-use management and land-zoning regulations, coupled with the inability to apply adequate building and construction standards, places more people at risk, as the poor settle in more hazardous areas and the level of damage created by natural hazards increases. Annually, over 200 million people are affected by natural disasters and this figure is likely to increase. The loss of personal assets, livelihoods and infrastructure involved puts a considerable brake on development.

62. The successful transition from relief to development is therefore inextricably linked with decreasing risks and the impact of natural hazards. Just as sustainable development processes are now incorporating environmental planning, it is now imperative to fully integrate disaster risk assessments and reduction strategies in national and regional planning. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction can contribute to this goal, by providing a dedicated international mechanism which is essential for building avenues of collaboration among humanitarian and development strategies. Disaster risk management also needs to be better integrated into the United Nations humanitarian and development planning processes, such as the consolidated appeals process and the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework process.

63. The engagement of private sector is also critical. The private sector represents key resources that could be used to support and further the United Nations system's activities, but which have been largely untapped to date. A number of recent partnerships between the United Nations agencies and individual companies, business associations, foundations and civil society organizations point to the complementarity of approaches and this should be further explored and encouraged. The private sector also has an important role in the immediate transition from relief to development and post-conflict pre-investment and job creation. Targeted investment in critical humanitarian rehabilitation sectors can set the proper foundations for longer-term reconstruction and development. The accompanying transfer of knowledge and technology is a significant contribution to local capacity-building

and, in certain circumstances, to disaster preparedness and prevention.

IV. The consolidated appeals process as a coordination, strategic planning and advocacy tool

64. In response to the request made by Member States during the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council during its substantive session of 2001, the Emergency Relief Coordinator commissioned an independent review of the consolidated appeals process to focus on the key strengths and weaknesses of the process as a resource mobilization mechanism and a coordination and strategic planning tool. The main findings of that study are presented below, including explanations for some of the major discrepancies in funding between different countries and sectors, and suggestions on how the process may be strengthened and enhanced and its use potentially expanded, such as in transition situations.

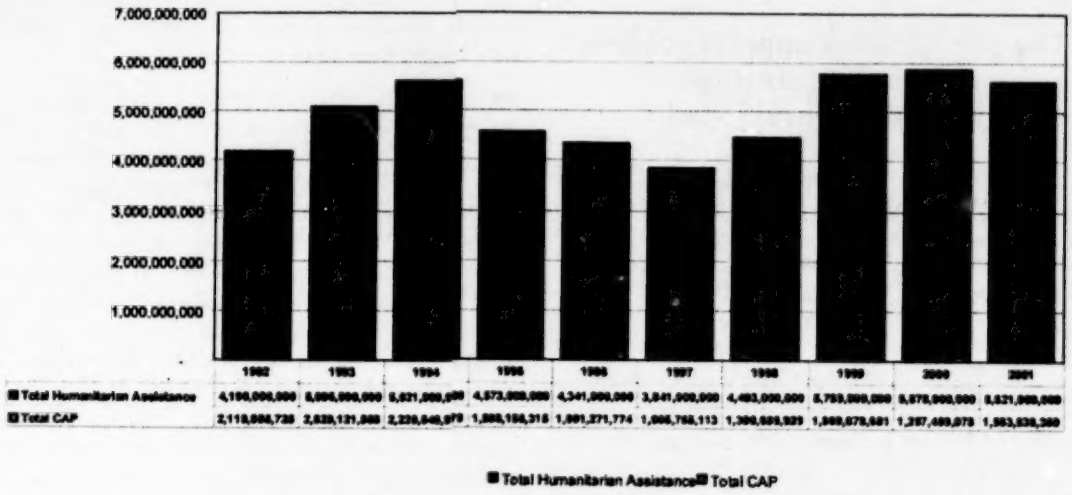
65. This review is the latest in a series of efforts to strengthen and improve the consolidated appeals mechanism. The consolidated appeals process was created in December 1991 under General Assembly resolution 46/182 to ensure that an initial consolidated appeal, covering all concerned organizations of the system and prepared in consultation with the affected State, would be quickly coordinated and issued in response to emergencies. It was first intended as an extraordinary process and only six consolidated appeals were issued in 1992, the first in response to the conflicts exacerbated by the drought in the Horn of Africa. During the 1990s, the number of consolidated appeals increased to cover the most urgent humanitarian crises of the time. However, the early appeals fell far short of what had been foreseen in General Assembly resolution 46/182. Without a coherent strategic approach, they were unable to fulfil the critical coordination function of the process. Early consolidated appeals were generally perceived as compilations of individual agency appeals. Since 1997, considerable efforts have been made to strengthen the strategic planning aspect of the process. The inclusion of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan has increased its value to the coordination process by including an element of strategic planning. The consolidated appeals process has been further strengthened by the inclusion of improved analytical tools and more consistent training materials. In general, the technical standards of the process are higher, as is the level of engagement of the United Nations agencies with it. Between 15 and 20 consolidated appeals are now issued each year.

66. Unexpectedly, however, such improvements, many of which were made at the request of donors, have not resulted in increased flows of humanitarian assistance through the consolidated appeals process. While the process remains the single most significant mechanism for humanitarian resource mobilization, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of humanitarian assistance channelled through it. This proportion has fallen from an average of 40 per cent to an average of 30 per cent over the past decade. In real terms, the process lost 10 per cent of "market share", equivalent to US$ 560 million in 2001. Much of this seems to have been redirected towards non-governmental organizations. The graph below illustrates what percentage of total humanitarian assistance is represented by programmes funded through the consolidated appeals process.

67. Overall levels of humanitarian funding have remained static "in real terms" which has resulted in a decline in the resources available in proportion to the increasing levels of need. Even where there are major and significant humanitarian crises, aid flows have not increased to respond to these large-scale emergencies but resources have been diverted from other appeals. In such circumstances, unless there are real increases in the levels of humanitarian assistance, "forgotten emergencies" are inevitable. What constitutes a "major" emergency can be dictated by political or strategic interest, and most significantly, by the media. The past eight years have demonstrated a clear trend of resources tending to congregate around the highest profile humanitarian crises for that year. Each year, one or two appeals, specifically, the Great Lakes region and the former Yugoslavia, have dominated the donor response. This reveals a serious lack of donor coordination to ensure more balanced support for humanitarian crises globally.

68. Within appeals, certain sectors have traditionally been well supported, while others are routinely underfunded. Food assistance dominates the response. Over the past two years, approximately 60 per cent of all global contributions to the consolidated appeals process consisted of support to the food sector. The

Figure 1
Consolidated appeals process as percentage of total humanitarian assistance



impact of food aid on nutrition will be significantly limited, unless it is provided along with curative health care, hygiene and adequate water and sanitation programmes. Health problems are a major component of the suffering faced by people affected by war and can loom larger than lack of food, shelter or protection. While there are imbalances between the provision of food aid and essential non-food items and services, these may not be as great as reflected by the consolidated appeals process. Donors appear to prefer to use the process for food aid and use other non-United Nations partners for support in other sectors, particularly agriculture, health and water and sanitation. One important conclusion to be drawn from this is the need for a more comprehensive picture of the totality of humanitarian needs and assistance flows. The absence of a global humanitarian financial tracking system is an obstacle to effective coordination.

Transition

69. Consolidated appeals for countries that are in the process of transition from relief to development have been the least funded. The main reason for this is the "compartmentalization" of different sources of funding. Most donors still retain sharp institutional divisions between "relief" and "development" funding, and are very seldom prepared to make both forms of resources available simultaneously in a country affected by a complex humanitarian emergency. While the trend in planning is to recognize that humanitarian and some development activities may have to be initiated concurrently, this institutional separation can leave "transition" countries particularly vulnerable in their first critical stages of emerging from conflict. Here again, without any significant increase in humanitarian funding, transitional activities will need to draw on money from traditional development budgets. Donors are urged to find better ways of accessing these resources, perhaps funnelling them through the consolidated appeals process. This would avoid creating a new funding mechanism and thus avoid reproducing precisely the artificial compartmentalization between relief, rehabilitation and development that is currently hampering transition activities. It is currently impossible to identify clearly either gaps in funding between sectors or determine where duplication exists.

Coordination and strategic planning

70. The consolidated appeals process is a key coordination tool for humanitarian assistance. It remains the only coordination mechanism that continually brings together Inter-Agency Standing Committee members, host Governments, non-governmental organizations and, increasingly, donors for shared analysis, and to discuss and set common strategies, objectives and principles for humanitarian assistance in a country or region. This is particularly

significant for regional consolidated appeals, as their preparation may provide one of the few or only forums for inter-agency discussion at the regional level.

71. The value of the consolidated appeals process as a coordination mechanism is limited by the fact that it does not represent the totality of humanitarian spending or trends in humanitarian funding. Humanitarian coordination would be considerably strengthened by improved financial analysis, supported by an overall financial tracking system that better accounts for the totality of humanitarian expenditure. This would also ensure higher levels of transparency and accountability for humanitarian assistance. Current definitions of humanitarian assistance are inadequate and do not properly reflect the true picture. As such, there is a requirement to review the current system of recording and tracking humanitarian assistance. This will require the full support of Member States, both donors and recipients of humanitarian aid, United Nations agencies and other humanitarian partners, and their commitment to full reporting of humanitarian assistance activities and flows.

72. The effectiveness of the consolidated appeals process as a coordination tool is dependent on the extent to which it can provide a common and agreed framework in a country or region. Increased non-governmental organization participation is required in both the appeal component and planning process. Donor coordination and engagement in the process is a further necessary element in improving its effectiveness. The consolidated appeal document only indirectly influences the funding decisions of many donors. Although donors want to see United Nations agencies continue to plan and coordinate together, the consolidated appeals process is unlikely to make them fund a project, agency or sector that they would not fund anyway. Donor decisions are more likely to be influenced by familiarity with a sector or agency than by prioritization established through the coordination process. Improved donor coordination is thus an absolute prerequisite of a more equitable humanitarian assistance system. Without it, efforts at improving the consolidated appeals process will unfortunately be very limited in their impact on beneficiaries.

Monitoring and evaluation

73. Undoubtedly, the consolidated appeals process would be a more effective instrument and advocacy tool if it could be used to identify the implications and impact of underfunding in particular sectors. However, this is a broader problem for all those engaged in humanitarian activity that is then reflected in the process. For the time being, progress in this area will be constrained by the lack of baseline data or effective monitoring tools, the development of which should be given more emphasis and support.

74. Evaluation and review have been key elements in ensuring continued improvements in the consolidated appeals process and a number of studies have been undertaken to review its modalities, processes, achievements and shortfalls. In May 2001, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee review resulted in a detailed framework for continuing agency commitment, including a Plan of Action that lists 19 specific actions for implementation in three general areas: strengthening senior level involvement in the consolidated appeals process, strengthening advocacy through the process, and strengthening it as a tool for strategic planning and coordination.

75. The past few years have also seen increased emphasis on the mid-year review process, and the introduction of the option of making revisions to the consolidated appeals process via ReliefWeb. Both processes hope to make the appeal documents into "living" documents that evolve in tandem with the humanitarian situation on the ground, improve strategic monitoring, and allow field staff and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs at Headquarters to note and draw attention to the impact of underfunding on the humanitarian situation. Finally, an improved financial tracking system was launched in 2001, which allows for more flexible and custom-based analysis of the funding status and donor contributions to appeals.

76. In short, the review has demonstrated that there is an urgent need for humanitarian funding to be increased. The consolidated appeals process is steadily losing more of the market share of humanitarian funding which also impacts on its effectiveness as a strategic planning and coordination tool. Furthermore, since the process does not reflect the pattern of total humanitarian expenditure, it cannot adequately identify where there are gaps in humanitarian funding and

which needs are going unmet. Member States are thus urged to support a more comprehensive system for financial information and analysis. If the process is to be used to address the issue of transition, it will be necessary either to increase overall levels of humanitarian funding or improve mechanisms for accessing development funding to avoid the gap that so often occurs in transition.

Advocacy

77. The review and other past evaluations have also indicated that the preparation, launch and follow-up of the consolidated appeals process are not accompanied by a coherent advocacy and public information strategy. The process represents both a subject and an important opportunity for advocacy that should be used to focus attention on "forgotten emergencies" and particular issues and constraints, as well as to increase overall levels of humanitarian funding. A more coherent and forceful advocacy effort is also required to achieve greater buy-in to the consolidated appeals process by non-governmental organizations, donors, recipient governments and other relevant parties.

V. Observations and recommendations of the Secretary-General

78. It is not entirely clear what effects the tragic events of 11 September 2001 will have on long-term humanitarian policy. However, it is evident that the environments that characterize complex humanitarian emergencies, where the protection of civilians is under threat and poverty is rampant, should not be allowed to fester. One of the more complex challenges faced by the humanitarian community is that of obtaining reliable access to support and protect the vulnerable populations. Without this, the provision of life-saving relief or recovery assistance is extremely difficult. New obstacles to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance are arising. The emergence of criminal armed gangs in complex humanitarian emergencies often increases and promotes insecurity, as such elements seek to benefit from and promote conflicts.

79. Effective humanitarian assistance also requires the engagement of local communities, institutions and structures. Too often, these are ignored when their capacity has been reduced by the crisis. An effective transition from relief to development demands their proper engagement and participation in the processes and management of humanitarian assistance and building their capacity to respond to their own crises. It is therefore important for the members of the international community to work together to provide the support needed in the humanitarian and developmental sphere in order to help address the root causes of violence and despair, which can give rise to the kind of horrific terrorist attacks so recently witnessed. Aid must work to reduce poverty and promote self-reliance and stability.

80. Despite the best intentions, the provision of humanitarian assistance can sometimes undermine the transition from relief to development. Legitimate concerns over impartiality of humanitarian assistance may limit the engagement and involvement of existing institutions and structures, as was the case in Afghanistan. When circumstances change, humanitarian actors must recognize this and adapt assistance programmes to engage at the earliest possible opportunity and ensure that humanitarian assistance is undertaken with people rather than for them.

81. The planning and programming of development assistance should take place as early as possible, alongside the planning of humanitarian assistance programmes. Although the time of delivery may vary, opportunities should be sought for providing targeted rehabilitation and development aid to support the livelihoods of vulnerable groups, even during conflict, especially where this can make an important contribution to peace-building efforts. An example of this is the situation in Somalia, where the international community is encouraged to provide developmental type aid to support some of the emerging pockets of stability in the country. This will help to contribute to a sense of normalcy and promote self-reliance for the affected communities. It will also have a positive effect for other areas in the country. The consolidated appeals process is an ideal mechanism for this type of support, as it brings together relief and recovery activities under a single strategy, while local capacity-building is factored into relief programmes.

82. The vulnerability of societies to natural disasters is clearly linked to poverty and weak planning. Dramatic urban growth, with the development of increasingly fragile infrastructure, is one factor that places the poor at higher risk from natural disasters. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the processes of

economic growth contribute to increasing vulnerability to natural hazards. As is the case in most crises, the greatest level of immediate response to disaster comes from within the local community or from the State. With the likelihood that there will be more frequent disaster events, it is incumbent on the international community to assist and support local, national and regional preparedness and response capacities.

83. The consolidated appeals process has become an important instrument for resource mobilization, humanitarian coordination and strategic planning. The considerable improvements in the process have not resulted in subsequent increased humanitarian assistance. Indeed, overall levels of humanitarian funding channelled through it have declined and a greater proportion is being directed through non-governmental organizations on a bilateral basis. Improved donor coordination could result in more effective and balanced funding of the consolidated appeals process and enhance effective coordination. Non-governmental organizations should also be brought more strongly into the process. The recognition that the consolidated appeals process reflects only part of all humanitarian funding highlights the need for an improved global tracking system for humanitarian assistance. This would strengthen coordination, help to avoid duplication and significantly enhance the accountability of humanitarian action.

84. The General Assembly and Economic and Social Council may wish to:

General Recommendations

(a) Urge and support United Nations country teams to promote contingency planning for all possible risks related to complex humanitarian crises or natural disasters in consultation with and in support of Governments;

(b) Invite the Secretary-General to continue to consult and support regional organizations to strengthen their capacities to respond to complex humanitarian crises and natural disasters and report to the Economic and Social Council on practical steps taken in this regard;

(c) Encourage relief organizations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other institutions to identify innovative ways to build local capacities in disaster management;

(d) Support the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to strengthen its regional presence to provide more effective support to disaster-prone countries within a given region and to better coordinate and develop existing response mechanisms;

(e) Encourage humanitarian agencies to support the initiative to further strengthen humanitarian information centres, by providing timely and accurate information on assessed needs and their activities to respond to them;

Reaching the vulnerable populations

(f) Call upon armed groups to respect the provisions of international humanitarian and human rights law, in particular, to allow safe and sustained access to the vulnerable segments of the population by humanitarian workers;

(g) Invite Member States to cooperate with the Secretary-General to facilitate the protection of civilians in armed conflict by promoting a culture of protection;

(h) Invite Member States to participate actively in regional workshops on the protection of civilians to impart knowledge and improve practice based on shared experiences;

(i) Support and encourage efforts to develop clear criteria and procedures for the identification and separation of armed elements in situations of massive population displacement;

(j) Welcome the initial assessment by the Secretary-General of the impact on humanitarian activities of the criminalization of the economy in conflict-shattered communities and request further reporting as appropriate;

(k) Note the establishment of the Unit on Internal Displacement in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and urge Member States to provide it with the necessary financial support to enable it to carry out its activities;

(l) Encourage the further application of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement by Member States;

(m) Urge the United Nations to continue its efforts to establish codes of conduct and standards

of behaviour for humanitarian workers, review protection and distribution mechanisms, and recommend actions that protect against sexual abuse and exploitation and the misuse of humanitarian assistance and report to the Economic and Social Council in that regard;

(n) Support efforts to develop guidelines to expedite the work of international urban search and rescue operations;

Transition from relief to development

(o) Encourage humanitarian strategies to identify and support engagement with local structures and institutions, as a means of assisting the transition from relief to development;

(p) Encourage the humanitarian and development community to facilitate the direct participation by local communities and populations in the identification and implementation of humanitarian and transitional programmes, with a view to supporting overall peace-building and reconciliation efforts;

(q) Invite Member States to support the incorporation and operationalization of disaster risk management analysis into poverty reduction, developmental and environmental strategies;

(r) Encourage the United Nations to strengthen its existing planning tools, such as the common country assessment, United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the consolidated appeals process, in order to better reflect disaster risk management;

(s) Support efforts to ensure that consolidated appeals contain adequate plans to unite relief and transitional programmes, including in the area of resource mobilization;

Consolidated appeals process

(t) Welcome the efforts made by the United Nations system to strengthen the consolidated appeals process as a coordination and strategic planning tool;

(u) Call upon non-governmental organizations to participate actively and systematically to contributing to the humanitarian strategy contained in consolidated appeals and support the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to engage in a dialogue with non-governmental organizations in order to ensure their involvement in the development of consolidated appeals;

(v) Call upon donors to support low-profile emergency appeals and ensure that funds foreseen for this purpose are not diverted in the response to large-scale emergencies, by increasing the overall levels of humanitarian assistance;

(w) Encourage donors to support humanitarian coordination and strategic planning by addressing agreed priority needs identified through the consolidated appeals process;

(x) Encourage the development of a global humanitarian financial tracking system which will allow improved coordination and accountability and encourage the Emergency Relief Coordinator to make proposals for the better definition of humanitarian assistance and the collection and dissemination of data on humanitarian needs and contributions;

(y) Encourage donors to meet annually and consider the global trend in humanitarian response to ensure that imbalances can be addressed when consolidated appeals are launched.

Notes

[1] Collated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Human Rights and Humanitarian Action in the publication entitled "Growing the Sheltering Tree: Protecting Rights Through Humanitarian Action".

[2] S/1999/957 and S/2001/331.

[3] E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, annex.